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93-101 Arch Street

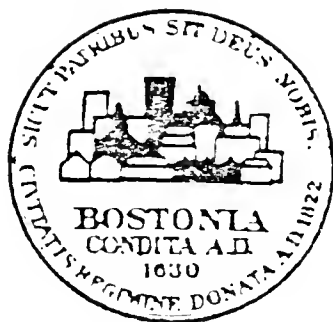


Boston Landmarks Commission

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93-101 Arch Street



Boston Landmarks Commission

REPORT OF THE BOSTON LANDMARKS COMMISSION
ON THE POTENTIAL DESIGNATION OF

93 - 101 ARCH STREET, BOSTON

AS A LANDMARK

Under Chapter 772 of the Acts of 1975, as amended

Approved by Marcia Puma 7/1/83
(Executive Director,)(Date)

Accepted by Pauline Chasoff 7/1/83
(Chairman)(Date)

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1.0 LOCATION OF THE PROPERTY

1.1 Address & Assessor's Parcel Number:

The address of the property under consideration is 93-101 Arch St., corner of Bussey Place and Snow Place. The Assessor's parcel number is 4597, which is located in Ward 3, Precinct 6.

1.2 Area in Which the Property is Located:

The building is located on the westerly side of Arch Street between Bussey Place and Snow Place in the area known as the Downtown Crossing. This comprises the retail shopping streets around the intersection of Washington, Summer and Winter Streets. The immediate vicinity of Arch, Summer and Franklin Streets is characterized by four to six story masonry structures that were built to replace those in the Great Fire of 1872. Contemporary newspaper accounts called them the "new palaces of Boston Merchants," and they typify the subtle stylistic variety and fine craftsmanship of the later 19th century. Immediately opposite the building is the mid-20th century complex of the Roman Catholic Arch Street Chapel.

1.3 Map Shows Location : Attached

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2.0 DESCRIPTION

2.1 Appearance

Number 93-101 Arch Street is a five story commercial structure with an essentially rectangular plan that fills its parcel. The dressed facade fronts on Arch Street and is of polychrome sandstone; the red brick side elevations face on Bussey Place and Snow Place.

The Arch Street elevation is arranged as a symmetrical five bay commercial facade with the outermost bays treated as beveled corners. The fenestration pattern is regular on all floors with three windows in the center bay, two in the flanking bays, and one in the beveled bay. The original ground floor storefront was replaced and is now a modernized mansardic derivation. The upper floors, both in masonry detail and sash treatment of two over two sash are identical to the original elevation drawing, with the exception of some fourth floor sash being boarded up.

High Victorian Gothic detail in the carved stonework of colonnettes and capitals, cornice, gable pediment and other decorative elements is finely rendered. At the second level are symmetrically arranged plaques displaying the building date of "1873" and the Harvard shield. Horizontal divisions are emphasized by the string course above the second level, and the cornice between the fourth and fifth floors.

The side elevations have had their original ground floor openings filled in; the window sash on the second and third floors now is two over two instead of the six over six that appear on the fourth and fifth floors; these elevations appear otherwise unchanged from the original elevation drawings.

2.1 PHOTOGRAPH: Attached





3.0 SUMMARY OF ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

3.1 Significance:

The commercial building at 93-101 Arch Street, Boston, is a finely detailed commercial example of the High Victorian Gothic style, one not common in the Central Business District, and is an early commission of Peabody and Stearns, one of the most prominent Boston architectural firms in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

The building was erected immediately after the Great Fire of 1872, which destroyed over 750 buildings in downtown Boston.¹ It is likely to have been built as an investment property by Harvard College,² which throughout the later 19th century owned a number of commercial buildings in the City. Reconstruction in the so-called "burnt district" proceeded very rapidly. The anniversary issue of the Boston Morning Journal, November 10, 1873, indicates in exacting detail the owners, architects, tenants, and physical appearance of the newly built structures and those nearing completion.

The immediate area around Summer Street to Winthrop Square was the major center of the dry goods trade both before and after the Great Fire. Harvard's new Arch Street building had typical mercantile tenants. The Barnes, Ward & Co. occupied the basement and ground floor, and Leland, Rice, & Co., jobbers of ready-made clothing leased the second through fifth floors.³ This type of occupancy continued for many years. At some point after 1925, the ground floor became a leased retail operation with uses ranging from restaurant to the present framing shop. The upper floors were eventually connected to the Kennedy's Department Store at the party wall and were used by Kennedy's until its closing in 1980.

The structures in the area were dubbed "the new palaces of Boston merchants" by contemporary newspaper accounts. Stylistically, they departed from the earlier, more somber granite style buildings by adopting a variety of Victorian motifs. While maintaining a similarity of materials, cornice lines, and fenestration patterns, they display features characteristic of the Italian Renaissance, High Victorian and Ruskinian Gothic, Panel Brick, and Neo-Grec styles which appealed to the Victorians.

The Morning Journal issue confirms that a handful of prominent Boston architectural firms designed most of the buildings in the area around Summer and Franklin Streets. Despite the variety of styles, the design by a limited number of architects help to account for the visual cohesiveness of the area. Represented are the firms of:

Emerson and Fehmer
Peabody and Stearns
N. J. Bradlee
Cummings and Sears
Charles F. Kirby
G. J. F. Bryant and Rogers
Winslow and Wetherell

The notation of a fee paid by Harvard College to Peabody and Stearns is corroborated by the set of original drawings of the Arch Street property in the Peabody and Stearns collection, the Boston Public Library Print Department. The notations on these refer to contract drawings, dated August 19, 1873, and are signed by individuals involved with the construction.

Robert S. Peabody, the son of Reverend Ephraim Peabody and Mary Jane Derby Peabody, was born in 1845 in New Bedford. Peabody received his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1866 from Harvard College. Upon graduation, he worked for Gridley J. F. Byrant, architect of numerous granite buildings, including Boston City Hall. A few months later, he transferred to the offices of Henry Van Brunt, where he met John Goddard Stearns, who was the chief draftsman. Both men were exposed to the methods and traditions of the Ecole des Beaux Arts while working for Van Brunt, who had received his training from Richard Morris Hunt, the first American to receive the French Ecole training. Peabody himself left for Europe in 1867. He studied in London briefly then enrolled at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. A fellow student was Charles Follen McKim. Upon his return to Boston in 1870, Peabody began his forty year partnership with Stearns. In his later years, Peabody became involved in many professional and civic organizations, besides writing extensively. Both partners died in 1917.

John Goddard Stearns, Jr. was born in New York City in 1843, and was graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Engineering in 1863 from the Lawrence Scientific School of Harvard College. He then joined Ware and Van Brunt's practice until his successful partnership was formed.

Scholars Wheaton Holden and Anthony Bond have provided insight into the working process of the firm. Peabody was the initial designer for their commissions with the staff then fleshing out his sketches with final approval of the design partner. Stearns was the expeditor and superintendent of construction. The division of responsibility was efficient and cooperative according to contemporaneous reports.⁴

The firm's work was extensive and encompassed nearly every building type from railroad stations to office buildings, and from a world's fair plan to boathouses. While their commissions were largely located in the northeast, examples of Peabody and Stearns' designs were found as far west as Oregon.

About sixty-two of the firm's designs were commercial buildings (including offices, stores, banks, and hotels); of these, some thirty-six were located in Boston, and twenty-two appear to remain. In the first decade of the partnership, of the eleven commercial buildings constructed, ten were located in Boston. Only three of these local designs remain; two are known works of Peabody and Stearns (the Arch Street building under study here and the Boston Post Building at 15-17 Milk Street) and one can be attributed to the firm (54-58 Kilby Street). Stylistically, the designs of the early period displayed variety from the High Victorian Gothic to French Second Empire to Queen Anne style. These were the popular styles of the decade for American architecture.

In the 1880's, the firm's second decade, the designs for commercial buildings numbered twelve and were spread geographically to the midwest. They are critical in the development of the firm's commercial style; the various eclectic styles were abandoned and a more personal style began to emerge: the fusion of Romanesque Revival with the Italian palazzo tradition. It is the merging of these two stylistic strains that characterized the architects' commercial style in the decade and was the precursor of their future design direction that remained firmly in the Neo-Classical mode. It was the work of this decade and the firm's overall competence in securing commissions that lead to their appointment as chief designers at the Worlds' Columbian Exposition, the Chicago Worlds Fair in 1891.

As previously stated, the High Victorian Gothic style is not particularly common in Boston's Central Business District. About fifteen examples of the style are identified in the Boston Landmarks Commission Central Business District and Theatre District Preservation Surveys. (The total number of surveyed properties is 788.) It is a style that was well-used in the 1860's and 1870's

in Boston and was popularized early by the English Gothicist, Gilbert Scott. Hallmarks of the style are general medieval decorative motifs, such as squat pointed arches, columns or colonnettes with foliate capitals, pointed dormers enlivening rooflines. Under the influence of John Ruskin, an English architect who embraced the continental medieval sources of Victorian Gothic, particularly, those of Northern Italy, Picturesque surface treatment and use of polychrome materials were absorbed in the High Victorian Gothic.

93-101 Arch Street is a finely rendered example of the High Victorian Gothic style, but is surpassed in overall architectural significance by several other downtown examples. These are the previously designated Boston Young Men's Christian Union, by N. J. Bradlee, 1875, the recently restored Cummings and Sears 1874 Bedford Building, and the Boston Post Building of 1873-4 by Peabody and Stearns, all of which were evaluated in the Landmarks Commission survey as Group II, Major Significance, while the Arch Street store was evaluated as Group III, Significant, but not meriting individual designation as a Boston Landmark.

3.2 Relationship to Landmark Criteria

93-101 Arch Street does not appear to meet the criteria for Landmark designation, as defined in Chapter 772 of the Acts of 1975, as amended because it does not possess sufficient distinctive characteristics of the High Victorian Gothic style to render it inherently valuable for the study of the period and style. While it is an early work of Peabody and Stearns, it is not a major commission and appears to be of significance only to the City of Boston.

4.0 ECONOMIC STATUS

4.1 Current Assessed Value and Property Tax:

The assessed value for fiscal year 1983 of Parcel 4597, 93-101 Arch St., is \$250,000, and its property tax is \$38,444.85.

4.2 Current Ownership and Occupancy:

The property is owned by the Batterymarch Trust, located at 125 High Street, Boston the trustees of which include Kingsley H. Durant, Thomas E. Williams, Olive R. Wentworth, Nicholas C. Johnson and William J. Spears, Jr.

The Trust also owns 26-30 Summer Street, assessor's parcel 4596, known as the Kennedy's Store, which is the subject of another study report for designation.

5.0 PLANNING CONTEXT

5.1 Relationship to Current Zoning

The building at 93-101 Arch Street is within a B-10 Zone, permitting all standard commercial uses up to an allowable physical density (measured by the Floor Area Ratio, or FAR) of ten times the total site area. The present structure uses about one half of the allowable floor area.

5.2 Current Planning-Issues

Number 93-101 Arch Street is located within the retail core of the City of Boston. It is located approximately two blocks from Boston's 100% corner, which is known now as the Downtown Crossing. This area, which is an auto restricted zone, has been the target of concentrated planning, public improvements, retail analysis and promotion over the past several years, all aimed at strengthening the retail economy of Downtown Boston.

The zone includes a 12 block area, with traffic banned on three blocks of the principal retail street, Washington Street, as well as segments of Winter and Summer Streets. Physical improvements included repaving the streets in brick, installing a continuous canopy along one side of Washington Street, and adding benches, new light fixtures, and other pedestrian amenities.

In general, the Downtown Crossing Project has been successful in boosting retail activity, with total weekday purchases in the area up 26% between 1978 and 1980.

Economic activity on Summer Street also stands to benefit from the LaFayette Place project, now under construction, which will introduce 300,000 square feet of retail space and a new 500 room hotel in the area.

Boston Redevelopment Authority planning and marketing studies prepared by Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill and now completed are optimistic about the potential of continued retail growth and economic development opportunities in the Downtown Crossing area, as well as adjacent sites. Small-scale public improvements to the physical environment of the retail area with special attention to Snow Place are recommended to upgrade the image and economic success of Downtown Crossing.

A more detailed examination of development issues pertaining to Summer Street and Franklin Street will be found in a study of the "Commercial Palace District" now being finalized by the Boston Redevelopment Authority and the Boston Landmarks Commission. This study analyzes current development activity in the area of Summer and Franklin Streets and forecasts future changes given current circumstances, suggests policies and guidelines for development in the area, and recommends mechanisms for implementing such policies and guidelines.

There is a specific development proposal for the immediate site, known as Franklin Place, a combined large-scale 500,000 square foot office and retail complex. It is in the planning and development phase, and the impact of this project is currently under consideration by the private developers and the City.

6.0 ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

6.1 Alternatives:

Both the significance of the structure and the language of the Commission's enabling statute, which prevents the Commission from designating districts in the central city under its own statute, limit designation by the Commission to the category of "Landmark."

The Commission also retains the option of not designating the building as a Landmark.

Alternatively, the City could, by ordinance, establish an historic district, including 93-101 Arch St., under the provisions of Chapter 40C of the General Laws.

6.2 Impact of Alternatives:

Landmark designation under Chapter 772, as amended would require the review of physical changes to the building exterior in accordance with standards and criteria adopted as part of the designation. It would not, however, affect the use or treatment of the building interior.

Creation of an historic district under Chapter 40C of the General Laws would mean that a local commission would be established to administer a design review process for development activity in the district. Exterior changes would be subject to review in a manner of the six districts now in existence in the City.

Thus, Landmark designation or establishment of a 40C district would mean that before 93-101 Arch Street could be altered or demolished, there would be review by a City commission to consider the alternatives affecting the exterior of the building.

In practical terms, failure to designate the building as a Landmark or establish a 40C district means that the building would be able to be demolished or rehabilitated depending on the owner's intentions.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

As has been previously identified in the Boston Landmarks Commission Survey, the building at 93-101 Arch Street is an important contributing part of a district, dubbed "the Commercial Palace District" which appears to meet the criteria for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. This district also would merit designation as a local historic district under Chapter 40C of the General Laws. It is the staff opinion that these mechanisms are more appropriate to 93-101 Arch Street than Landmark designation.

The building is important to the city as part of a fragile district which has suffered severe losses during the last decade. It deserves to be preserved for the contribution it makes to the scale and texture and historical continuity of this rich area. It does not appear to meet the criteria for individual Landmark designation as set forth in the Commission's enabling statute, and therefore should not be designated as a Landmark. However, the Commission should vigorously pursue such other actions as would encourage retention and re-use, not only of 93-101 Arch Street, but also other buildings in the Commercial Palace District.

8.0 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND FOOTNOTES

8.1 Bibliography

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8.2 Footnotes

1. Boston Landmarks Commission, Central Business District Preservation Study , Part II- Draft Summary of Findings, 1980.
2. Harvard University archives.
3. Boston City Directories , 1874; Whiting, Schedule of Buildings and their Occupancy, (1877).
4. Holden, W., JSAH , (May, 1973) and Bond, A., The Commercial Architecture of Peabody and Stearns in Boston , unpublished Master's Thesis, Pennsylvania State University, (1974). Anthony Bond's extensive study of the work of Peabody and Stearns apparently did not include the Arch St. store, because its drawings were interfiled with other unidentified Peabody and Stearns drawings. The Peabody and Stearns collection is vast and has had only the minimal archival and conservation treatment that the Print Department can afford. The Arch St. drawings were discovered after a specific reference to a payment by Harvard to the architects was found in the University archives.

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